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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 BRASILIA 000391

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [BR](#)

SUBJECT: BRAZIL: GAZA PLEDGE, ARAB SOUTH AMERICAN SUMMIT:  
PLAY FOR MID-EAST CLOUT CONTINUES

REF: A. 09 BRASILIA 00322  
[1](#)B. 05 BRASILIA 1252  
[1](#)C. 05 BRASILIA 760  
[1](#)D. 09 BRASILIA 43  
[1](#)E. 08 BRASILIA 1685  
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[1](#)O. 07 BRASILIA 2262  
[1](#)P. 07 BRASILIA 2217  
[1](#)Q. 08 BRASILIA 000896

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Lisa Kubiske. Reason 1.5 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: President Lula's trip to Doha to attend the March 31 Arab-South American Summit will continue a year of intense Middle East diplomacy that kicked off when Amorim matched Brazil's largest foreign aid contribution by pledging USD 10 million for Gaza reconstruction. Following the March 26 reciprocal visit to Brazil by Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki (septel), the Brazilian Middle East agenda for 2009 includes: a planned Lula visit to Israel, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia later in the year; bilateral political talks with Syria; continuing negotiations on free trade deals with Egypt and Jordan; and continuing involvement in Israeli-Palestine peace talks, including a push for an Annapolis follow-up conference in Moscow. Brazil's Middle East diplomacy is considered within the government an important component of Brazil's global leadership aspirations, and Brazil's pledge at Sharm al-Sheikh signals Brazil's growing understanding it must be prepared to bear some of the costs of leadership. Brazil's views on Middle East Peace issues are evolving but still lack depth, which leads to positions that are not yet helpful in resolving the problem. Arab diplomats with whom we have spoken call Brazil's views on the Middle East "nave." In light Brazil's

determined inroads into the Middle East arena and Brazilian officials' openness to discuss Middle East-related issues on a broad basis with us, Post continues to believe that a visit by high-level briefer or briefers from NEA (per ref q) to discuss various aspect of our Middle East policies would be valuable.

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Arab-South America Summit Next on Lula's Agenda  
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¶2. (C) Following Foreign Minister Amorim's attendance at the Sharm al-Sheikh conference and pledge of USD 10 million (ref a) to assist in Gaza reconstruction efforts, Counselor Claudio Cesar Rodrigues do Nascimento, head of the Ministry of External Relations' (MRE, or Itamaraty) Middle East Division I, which handles non-Gulf countries, told poloff that the next significant item on Brazil's Middle East was President Lula's trip to Doha to attend the Second Arab South America Summit (ASPA), to be held from March 31 to April 1. According to Nascimento, summit preparations have been proceeding apace during the past several months, including a foreign minister's meeting that took place on March 4 in Cairo. Nascimento added that the ASPA is very nearly at a point that it functions as an institutionalized mechanism. Since the original summit in 2005, there have been five high-level meetings at the undersecretary level, bi-annual meetings at the foreign minister level, and multiple meetings involving ministers of agriculture, environment, and culture.

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¶3. (C) Asked whether Brazil expected a reprise of the 2005, when various controversial statements critical of Israel and the United States would be part of the declaration of what was intended as a primarily economic and cultural event, Nascimento indicated that Brazil would try to keep polemical statements out but that there is already a baseline and that it would be hard to avoid repeating what everyone already agreed to once. (Comment: Doha will almost certainly see a repeat of the controversial declaration that was approved during the 2005 summit, during which, despite assurances to the USG that the Summit declaration would avoid polemical topics, Brazil caved to Arab countries on all controversial issues. The declaration included language demanding that Israel withdraw to its 1967 frontiers, uproot all settlements, and comply with the ICC's 2004 decision on dismantling the security wall, and criticized the United States for imposing unilateral sanctions under the 'Syria Accountability Act'. Virtually identical language was included in the declaration of the III Foreign Ministers meeting in Buenos Aires in February 2009, as well as the meetings of the high-level officials that took place in Doha in October 2008 and Santa Cruz, Bolivia in July 2007. On the positive side, the declarations also tend to include statements supporting debt forgiveness for Iraq and calling on all states in both regions to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. See refs d and e for additional information on the first ASPA summit held in Brasilia in ¶2005. End comment.)

¶4. (C) Nascimento noted that while these polemical statements are hard to keep out of the declaration, they should not take away from the principal focus of the summit, which is to increase commercial, educational, cultural, scientific, and agricultural cooperation among the countries. Some initiatives in these areas that are already bearing fruit include: the creation of an Arab-South American Library in Algeria, which has already issued its first book (about the nineteenth century travel of Iman al-Baghdadi through Brazil), which will be published in three languages in Brazil, Algeria and Venezuela; the creation of a South American Research Institute in Morocco; conferences on water issues such as irrigation, desertification, management of water resources in arid zones; and the establishment of

Arab-South American Technology University in Venezuela. In the commercial area, Nascimento noted that trade between Brazil and the Arab world has increased to USD 20 billion, a 150 percent increase since the 2005 summit.

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Brazil and the Peace Process: Securing a Place at the Table  
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15. (C) Discussing Brazil's role during the recent Sharm al-Sheikh donors conference (ref a), Nascimento noted that Brazil's USD 10 million pledge-- which, together with a donation in the same amount made after the Paris donors conference, constitute the largest aid donations made by Brazil in its history-- was a deliberate statement on the part of Brazil to signal that it is serious about its involvement in the peace process and that it understands that to be a player it must bear some of the costs. He further added that Amorim's flurry of activity during the recent crisis in Gaza was indicative of the level of involvement the world should now expect from Brazil. (see refs d and e for Amorim's actions during the fighting in Gaza). He further added that MRE now had an expectation that the dialogue on the Middle East that had developed throughout the past couple of years during meetings with high-level U.S. officials would continue and even be expanded (refs f-p).

16. (C) Asked whether Brazil was worried about appearing to

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take a one-sided view of the conflict in light of Amorim's statement during the Sharm al-Sheikh conference placing the burden of achieving peace almost squarely on Israel, as well as statements made by President Lula's foreign policy advisor Marco Aurelio Garcia comparing Israel's actions in Gaza to "state terrorism," Nascimento dodged the question by noting that Brazil's position has remained consistent. The keys to achieving peace, according to Nascimento, include the participation of the relevant players in the peace process, to include HAMAS and Syria. This would require a willingness on the part of the United States and Israel to soften the view that HAMAS first has to renounce its charter provisions as preconditions for talks. According to Nascimento, the Brazilian government feels that HAMAS should have a place at the next peace conference, even if it may be necessary to invite them to participate as part of the Palestinian Authority delegation.

17. (C) In addition, Nascimento noted, the proposed Moscow conference, as a follow-up to Annapolis, should occur at the earliest possible date. In fact, Nascimento added, during Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's November visit to Brazil, Lavrov indicated that Russia expected to host a follow-on conference in Moscow. Nascimento reiterated what has been widely reported in press reports and public statements to be Brazil's view: that the broadest set of interested parties should be invited, including countries within the region such as Iran, and others outside, like Brazil, since, as President Lula has indicated, the old formula that involved a small number of players from the developed world "has failed."

18. (C) Asked if President Lula still planned to visit Israel and the Palestinian territories--a visit originally supposed to take place last year-- Nascimento indicated that the visit was still very much a priority. Acknowledging the earlier question on the perception of Brazil's stance, Nascimento indicated that Brazil understood that President Lula needs to visit both Israel and the Palestinian territories, rather than one or the other, if Brazil was to maintain its "neutral" posture. Nascimento added that Saudi Arabia was another likely stop on a Middle East trip.

19. (C) Nascimento added that it was a good time to be a Middle East specialist at Itamaraty, as the region is gaining bureaucratic clout within the ministry. In addition to two Middle East divisions, Itamaraty has two special envoy

positions related to the Middle East: a four person office headed by Ambassador Affonso Celso Ouro Preto, and a second one headed by Ambassador Gilberto Moura to handle ASPA (Note: prior to being appointed Ambassador to North Korea, Ambassador Arnaldo Carrilho held the position of Special Advisor for ASPA. Ambassador Gilberto Moura has been named to that position, although he remains for the moment in charge of the Department of Regional Mechanisms. End note.) Although Brazil now embassies in most Arab and Middle Eastern countries, plans are in the works to open a post in Oman, according to Nascimento.

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Syria is Ready to Make Peace  
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¶10. (C) Poloff also asked Nascimento about the recent accord signed between Brazil and Syria in early February in which the two countries agreed to hold annual political talks, Nascimento noted that the two countries have an improving relationship, one that was based mostly on trade, but that, as with other countries with which Brazil holds annual political talks such as Iran, Lebanon, and Palestine, is increasingly focused on broader interests. He added that although trade with Syria is still small, it has increased tremendously in recent years. (Note: Since President Lula

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took office in 2003, Brazilian exports to Syria have increased 420 percent, to USD 281 million in 2008 out of total trade volume of USD 313 million. End note)

¶11. (C) He added that Brazil was very curious to see whether the new U.S. administration would make overtures with regards to Syria. According to Nascimento, they have indications from multiple conversations with Syrian counterparts that Damascus would be very receptive to signals from Washington suggesting greater openness, and that in fact, it is MRE's belief that the Syrian track might stand a better chance of being completed before the Israeli-Palestine one. Although he would not elaborate on that point, he indicated that Foreign Minister Amorim and others in MRE had held multiple conversations with Syrian counterparts and believe they have a good line into the Syrian leadership.

----- Arab Diplomats Express Mixed Feelings about Brazil Involvement -----

¶12. (C) Despite MRE's sense that ASPA was an important reflection of Brazil's ability to act as a bridge between Latin American countries and other regions of the world and their evident pride in participating in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egyptian and Jordanian diplomats in Brazil have expressed skepticism about the depth of the common interest that bound the two regions and frustration with Brazil's simplistic vision of the region. Minister Mahmoud Nayel, of Egyptian Embassy in Brasilia, told poloff that the Summit is a nice initiative, but mostly symbolic, a comment echoed by Counselor Suheil Haddad, from the Jordanian Embassy.

¶13. (C) According to Nayel, ASPA represents an effort to bind the two regions in areas of trade, culture, and technical cooperation, but that it remains a very superficial as there are few natural affinities between the two regions, and the distances and lack of travel routes limit commercial opportunities. Brazil, according to Nayel, is the most natural partner for the Arab countries because of its large Arab population, but even that is largely limited to Lebanon and Syria, from which the vast majority of Brazil's Arabs came. By contrast, Nayel and Haddad noted, there may be, at most, 500 Egyptians in Brazil and perhaps 200 Jordanians.

¶14. (C) What is apparent, Nayel noted, is that ASPA and Brazil's involvement in the peace process are transparent attempts on the part of Brazil to gain clout for its ambition

to be on the UN Security Council. "It is an obsession," noted Nayel, "and frankly, I don't know how to talk to them about it anymore, since it colors every one of our conversations." Nayel added that although Egypt welcomes Brazil, "a responsible and serious country", into the peace process, Nayel was at a loss explain what Brazil's contribution could amount to and suggested that the Brazilian position was very superficial. Nayel criticized Brazil's claim that it has a role to play as a result of the example of communities of Jewish and Arab communities who co-exist in Brazil in peace, calling it a specious justification. Nayel also noted that their Sharm al-Sheikh pledge was well received, but observed that it was "dismal" in proportion to the role to which they aspire, and wondered if Brazil had the stomach to make the hard choices they would have to make if they wanted a substantive role.

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Arab Diplomats: Trade, But Not Much Else, Drives Relations  
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¶15. (C) Asked to react to a comment by Brazil's new Ambassador to Egypt, Cesario Melantonio Neto, who in November 2008 commented that Brazil and Egypt were experiencing the

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best moment of their relationship, Nayel noted that it was just simply "diplomatic talk", and that there is not much substance to the relationship beyond trade--an area where there had, admittedly, been a deliberate increase in activity since President Lula took office-- and a "few common issues related to the Non-Aligned Movement agenda". (Note: In the 6 years that President Lula has been in office, exports to Egypt have tripled from USD 462 million in 2003 to USD 1.4 billion. Egyptian imports have quadrupled, but Brazil still maintains an overwhelmingly favorable trade balance of USD 1.2 billion. By comparison, in the previous six years prior to Lula taking office, exports to Egypt had increased but at a much lower clip of about 70 percent from USD 224 million in 1996 to USD 386 million in 2002. End note.)

¶16. (C) Nayel also noted that talks on a Mercosul-Egypt free trade agreement had advanced in 2008, with Mercosul in October submitting a proposal for negotiations. Nayel noted, however, that Egypt's business community did not seem enthusiastic about the agreement, putting in question how quickly the two sides could reach agreement.

¶17. (C) Counselor Haddad from the Jordanian Embassy echoed Nayel's comments regarding the Brazil-Jordan relationship. Haddad noted that trade was the basis for the relationship and that Jordan wanted to improve its trade position in relation to Brazil, which had been quite aggressive in pushing for increased trade between the two countries over the last several years. (Note: Brazil's exports to Jordan have increased around 800 percent over the last six years, to USD 294 million in 2008. Jordanian imports remain at a miniscule USD 24 million, or 13 percent of total trade volume between the two countries. End note.) Negotiations on a Mercosul-Jordan free trade agreement have advanced and a framework agreement was signed in July 2008.

¶18. (C) Haddad also observed that beyond trade, the bilateral relationship was not particularly close, but noted that King Abdullah's visit to Brasilia in October of last year and the signing of nine accords on tourism, science and technology, education, culture, agriculture, as well as law enforcement cooperation, should be a breakthrough in the relationship. This breakthrough, however will take time, considering MRE's problems in staffing up to a level that they can handle their ambitious global outreach--at least five years or more, according to Haddad.

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Comment:  
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¶19. (C) Brazil continues to build on a vigorous Middle East diplomacy that started with President Lula -- a policy that stands on the pillars of increasing trade, burnishing its global power credentials through its participation in the Middle East peace process, and gaining a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. They have been very successful on the first pillar and have made inroads on the second. Although still a somewhat superficial mechanism, ASPA is supporting Itamaraty's and President Lula's aggressive outreach to the region, helping improve bilateral relations with almost every country in the Middle East, while showcasing Brazil as a bridge between two different and distant regions, important elements in Brazil's long-term strategy to gain a UNSC seat.

¶20. (C) Comment, continued: Although it remains vague, the Brazilian formula for achieving peace can be outlined: it consists of having the broadest possible number of actors involved at the peace table, both state and non-state within and outside the region, putting pressure on Israel to uproot settlements and restrain itself from conducting

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disproportionate retaliatory attacks, easing of what they see as hard-line positions with regards to talking to HAMAS, and finally, reduction of the U.S.'s preeminent role broker of peace as a result of our failure to be a balanced actor. To the extent it has defined a role within this process, it consists of improving relationships with countries in the region, which they believe allows them act as a good faith mediator between all parties. But without more meat to its policies, even those in the Arab world who welcome Brazil's place at the table see their efforts as ham-handed positioning for global leadership and seem to be growing impatient with Brazil's anodyne generalities.

¶21. (C) Comment, continued: In light of Brazil's actions during Gaza, its role as driver of the ASPA process, its calls for a follow-up conference to Annapolis and its frequent criticism of the U.S. actions in the region, Post continues to believe that (per ref q) a visit to Brasilia by a high-level briefer or briefers from NEA or other agencies, preferably at the DAS-level or higher, for detailed discussions with Brazilian government officials would be of value. Although we are unlikely to persuade the GOB to take an approach fully in step with ours, it is critical to engage the GOB both to ensure it has a complete understanding of U.S. policy and concerns in the region, and to demonstrate that we take Brazil's leadership aspirations seriously. It is our hope that doing so will encourage Brazil to consult with the United States more frequently and will serve to minimize the least helpful aspects of current Brazilian policy toward the Middle East.

SOBEL